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OF THE

FORMATION OF THE MILTON CHURCH.

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BY

DEA. JOHN A. TUCKER.

MILTON, MASS.,
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Henry B. Tucker.
June 25, 1906.

THE MILTON CHURCH.

After the Milton Church was formed in 1678, and after Mr. Thacher was settled as Minister three years later, the next step in the routine of Church establishment was the election of Deacons.

At a Church meeting, June 12, 1681, Thomas Swift was chosen to serve in this office, but he was loth to accept, and it was not till the next year, when the Church elected Roger Sumner also, that these two consented and were installed as Deacons of the Milton Church. Roger Sumner died May 26, 1698, having served sixteen years, and the following July, on the 31st day, Ephraim Tucker succeeded him to that office.

The next year, 1699, July 30th, George Sumner was elected, and in 1716, Sept. 16th, these two follow—Manasseh Tucker and Ebenezer Wadsworth. Two years later, Aug. 31st, 1718, John Wadsworth was chosen. Then, again, five years later, Dec. 2, 1723, two more were selected for the office of Deacons, viz., Timothy Crehore and Nehemiah Clap. These were followed at intervals by Benjamin Wadsworth, William Tucker, Josiah Howe, Ebenezer Tucker, John Vose, Cornelius Gulliver and William Vose. The dates of the election of these last seven I have not been able to find.

Then comes David Tucker, who was chosen Oct. 14, 1798; Amariah Tucker, June 30, 1808; William Wadsworth, Sept. 4, 1808; Isaac Tucker, Nov. 19, 1820; Isaac Gulliver and Lemuel Adams, June 26, 1825, and Atherton Tucker later.

These twenty-three Deacons served in succession from the early history of the Church down to about the time of the division of the Church, in 1834. And they not only served the Church in that capacity, but they were also prominent as town officials.

In 1719, three of the five selectmen were Deacons, and in more than one-half of this period of the town's history one or more of the Deacons have held that office. In other lines, also, whether in time of peace or war, they have filled important places of trust and service. The average age of these men was 67, the extremes being 38 and 89 years.

The two last names in my list are Lemuel Adams and Atherton Tucker. Dea. Adams was a direct descendant of Thomas Swift, one of the first two Deacons over two centuries ago, and Dea. Tucker was also a descendant from the other of the first Deacons—Roger Sumner. So that these earlier Deacons not only served their own generation, but they gave to a later age in their family line those who were appointed to the same duties even to the third and fifth generations.

Dea. Adams' mother was sixteen years old when Mr. Thacher, the first Pastor of the Milton Church, died, and she lived till her son Lemuel was twenty-six years old, so that she might well have told him much of the life and habits of Mr. Thacher which had come under her own observation, and he in turn might have repeated it to one of our own number now living who was seventeen years old at the time of his death and who even now well remembers Dea. Lemuel Adams. This gives us but two links in the chain of transmission from Mr. Thacher's time to our own, and seems to bring our first Pastor nearer to us than when we look back through the dim outline of two hundred years.

Whenever the people of Milton have had occasion to call a Minister, they have selected the best man they could get. And they have always selected from choice imported stock. None of our Pastors have been natives of the town. But it is not so with the Deacons whose names I have read. They have been of homespun, and all belonging to Milton families, and so to the manor born, unless we may except two or three among the first-mentioned, and of these two or three only one, namely Roger Sumner, was foreign born, he being an Englishman.

The Sumner House, on Brush Hill, at the head of Robbins Street, is supposed to be the one where Dea. Sumner lived, though many changes have been made in it since. Dea. Sumner's next neighbor on the west was Dea. Manasseh Tucker, and his brother, Dea. Ephraim Tucker, lived next to him, while Dea. George Sumner's place adjoined his. So that these four Deacons lived in a group with no intervening owners, although the first of these had died before the appointment of the other three. Further along on the hill were four or five more who at one time or another filled the office of Deacon, while to crown all, at the summit, the highest house on the hill, was the home of another who served in the same office.

The memory and influence of these good men is felt to the present day, though the Deacon himself has left the hill. His seat in the chimney corner is vacant, and the trolley car has taken the place of his "one-horse shay."

Dea. Roger Sumner had something of a roving turn, but when he came to Milton he came to stay. He is the only one of the earliest settlers whose descendant of the same surname improves with his own hands his ancestral land.

This descendant, one of our well-known citizens in

this year of our Lord 1903, "plows and sows, reaps and mows" the same garden patch and broad fields which his great-great-great-grandfather did more than two hundred years ago.

In looking over the inventories of these our progenitors, we get an insight into their habits and occupations. They cleared the forest, using the logs for timber and fuel; tilled the soil, raising grain and vegetables for food and flax for linen cloth; also sheep, which gave them both food for the table and wool for their warmer clothing. Among Roger Sumner's possessions at his death were various farming implements, including five old axes.

I fancy he and his sturdy sons laid low many a monarch oak and lofty pine. The poet's call, "Woodman, spare that tree," suits our own times better than theirs.

Dea. Swift also engaged in the same occupation, and he did not hesitate to conform to the custom of the times in the employment of slaves. In his will he leaves his negro woman to his wife, and his negro man and Indian boy to his son Samuel.

Another Deacon left to his heirs four slaves, named as follows: Hared, Cæsar, Dinah and Kate.

These Deacons followed the example of the Rev. Peter Thacher, who had two negro servants, Ebed and Hager. Slavery existed to a limited extent in New England for one hundred and fifty years, but it did not possess the demoralizing and cruel character which was developed in some parts of the Southern states.

The domestic customs of the times are further shown in such articles of industry as these: Dea. Nehemiah Clap had 9 wooden plates, 2 spinning wheels, 1 reel, 1 pair wool cards, 2 looms and worsted combs. We should hardly know what to do with

these implements if they had been preserved to our own times. We do, indeed, have wheels and reels, cards and combs, but they are different in style and use from Dea. Clap's. No doubt the cloth from his two looms might outlast some seen on the bargain counters of our department stores. In those times the cloth possessed worth, and in that it was a type of the men of whom we are speaking. For then, as always, "Worth makes the man."

Dea. Benjamin Wadsworth exceeded Dea. Clap in industrial items. He had 7 spinning wheels, linen, woollen, and cotton yarn, flax, tow, and worsted; also 2 yoke of oxen, Indian corn, wheat, oats, flax-seed, and various farming implements. He had also what I do not find mentioned in any of the other estates, namely, a silver watch; but his best possession was his wife. She was Esther, daughter to Dea. Roger Sumner's grandson, who was also a Deacon.

In the inventory of Dea. William Tucker's effects are mentioned 2 Bibles and other books valued at £1 0s. 4d. What part of this £1 0s. 4d. is for the Bibles and what part for the other books is not specified, but we may be sure that in those times, when faith was strong, reverence for the Bible fervent, and books scarce, the Bible was beyond price. In disposing of their estates these men made a just distribution among their children and heirs, being specially mindful of their wife's wants and comforts. One Deacon charges his son to provide his mother firewood at the door, the use of two cows summer and winter, a horse to ride to meeting with, money to be paid her at intervals, and other items, showing a kind regard for the long-loved companion.

In writing their wills these Deacons showed also their affection for their wives by such expressions as "my well-beloved wife" or my "dearly beloved

wife," showing that their early love kept warm till the close of life.

The provision which Dea. Manasseh made for his dearly beloved for her conveyance to meeting, may suggest to some of you to add a codicil to your will providing your "dearly beloved" with means of conveyance to church—either the family horse, the more up-to-date auto, or the coming and as yet unnamed air conveyance, and so lead to the re-establishment of the weekly Church-going instead of only on quarter centennial occasions.

There is only one member of this Church now living who was baptized in the old meeting-house before the division. He is a sort of tie between the two churches. But do not let us suppose as these links one after another pass away the churches become more and more distinct. Your own observation will lead you to quite a different conclusion.

There is more of a disposition to unite in labors of love to our fellow-man than there is to dispute about what God is going to do with that fellowman after we get through with him.

Seventy years ago our different creeds were held with a bitter grip, and that bitterness was felt for many years. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But we are the grandchildren (another generation), and the bitterness has now clean gone. This day witnesses a loving reunion.

Though we may still differ in belief on some points, we can work together in harmony for righteousness in the community.

May this harmony long endure, and from all such sour grapes, "Good Lord, deliver us."

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